

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RECOGNIZES WORLD REFUGEE DAY

(Richmond, Va.)— The Virginia Newcomers Health Program (VNHP) is recognizing refugee health services in Virginia in commemoration of World Refugee Day which was this past Sunday, June 20. Generally, a refugee is a person who has fled his or her country because of fear of persecution. Asylum is a form of protection that allows individuals who are in the United States to remain here, provided that they meet the definition of a refugee and are not barred from either applying for or being granted asylum, and eventually to adjust their status to lawful permanent resident.

“Coming into a new country and culture can be overwhelming for refugees,” explained State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H. “It is important that we try to make the transition easier while ensuring the health and safety of entering refugees and the citizens of the Commonwealth.

In 2003 The Commonwealth received 1,213 new immigrants classified as refugees or asylees. They came from 51 different countries, including Sierra Leone (159), Ethiopia (148), Cuba (116), Somalia (102) and Afghanistan (101). They resettled in 19 of the 35 health districts in Virginia. Health assessments for 945 individuals were completed by local health departments. 2,650 health referrals were made and 2,645 various immunizations were needed.

VNHP, in partnership with the Department of Social Services, provides initial health assessments to refugees and asylees soon after their arrival to the U.S. Local health departments are uniquely qualified to identify infectious diseases and offer initial health assessments within 30 days to protect both the newcomers and Virginia’s citizens. Immunizations for all vaccine preventable diseases are provided and health referrals are made during the initial health assessment, helping newcomers through the resettlement process and ensuring self-sufficiency as quickly as possible.

“Many refugees and immigrants are leaving conditions that most of us could not imagine and may have waited years for resettlement,” explained Anna Davis, R.N., VNHP Coordinator. “This population faces many challenges, but we hope that through communicating and partnering with other agencies and voluntary organizations within communities to provide initial health care, our program offers them the beginning of a happier and healthier future here.”

For more information on World Refugee Day, events go to <http://www.unrefugees.org/>. To learn more about the Virginia Newcomers Health Program go to <http://www.vdh.state.va.us/epi/rihp/index.htm>.

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